CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

CD/1550
12 August 1998

Original: ENGLISH

LETTER DATED 12 AUGUST 1998 FROM THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF AUSTRIA ADDRESSED TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE CONFERENCE TRANSMITTING THE TEXT OF A PRESS STATEMENT BY THE AUSTRIAN FOREIGN MINISTER WOLFGANG SCHUSSEL IN HIS CAPACITY AS PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION ON THE DECISION OF THE CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT TO ESTABLISH AN AD HOC COMMITTEE TO NEGOTIATE A TREATY BANNING THE PRODUCTION OF FISSILE MATERIAL USED IN NUCLEAR WEAPONS ISSUED IN VIENNA ON 11 AUGUST 1998

I have the honor to transmit in the annex the text of a press statement by the Austrian Foreign Minister Wolfgang Schüssel in his capacity as President of the Council of the European Union on the decision of the Conference on Disarmament to establish an ad hoc committee to negotiate a treaty banning the production of fissile material used in nuclear weapons, issued in Vienna on 11 August 1998.

I should be grateful if the text could be circulated as an official document of the Conference on Disarmament.

(Signed) Harald Kreid
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

Press statement by the Austrian Foreign Minister Wolfgang Schüssel

Foreign Minister Schuessel, in his capacity as President of the Council of the European Union, welcomes the decision taken today by the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in Geneva to establish an Ad Hoc Committee and to start negotiations on a treaty banning the production of fissile material for nuclear weapons and other nuclear explosive devices (Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty - FMCT).

With the launching of the negotiations on a FMCT, the realisation of the next logical step after the conclusion of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in 1996 on the road towards nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament is within reach. Since the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference when agreement on this objective was achieved, the European Union has steadfastly supported the commencement of such negotiations in the CD. The decision taken by the CD today was based on a proposal which Austria had made earlier this year.

We have frequently reiterated the importance of such a treaty which will cap the fissile material stockpiles available for use in nuclear weapons and strengthen the international nuclear non-proliferation regime by adding new constraints, including verification arrangements on all relevant facilities. It will thus constitute a significant contribution towards the achievement of both nuclear non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament.

In view of the recent nuclear tests in India and Pakistan, the consensus decision to start negotiations comes at a crucial moment.